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ABSTRACT

Enrollment management and marketing strategies employed by the largest state university users of American College Testing (ACT) program tests were studied. The primary objective was to develop a descriptive profile of institutional practices and role performance factors. The study population was the 54 largest state university users of ACT student profile and research services. In addition to examining institutional data files, questionnaires were administered to 44 chief academic officers and 28 student services officers. Chief academic officers in 45 percent of the institutions reported the use of market research studies of prospective student attitudes and perceptions. A majority of campus officers interviewed acknowledged a lack of familiarity with existing institutional research data and changing student interests from ACT research profiles. Results suggest that if a single person at a strategic level is assigned primary responsibility for enrollment management, plans are more likely to be developed and results are more likely to be achieved. Overall, the findings reveal a high level of role ambiguity and organizational resistance to enrollment management. (SW)

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ROLE AMBIGUITY IN INSTITUTIONAL MARKETING AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

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This paper was presented at the Twenty-Fourth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Hyatt-Regency in Fort Worth, Texas, May 6-9, 1984. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum papers.

Daniel R. Coleman, Chairman
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ABSTRACT

ROLE AMBIGUITY IN INSTITUTIONAL MARKETING AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Results reported in this paper are based on an exploratory study of enrollment management and marketing strategies among the largest state university users of ACT tests. Findings reveal a high level of role ambiguity and organizational resistance to enrollment management.

ROLE AMBIGUITY IN INSTITUTIONAL MARKETING AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Researchers and decision-makers in higher education institutions have for more than a decade discussed the impending impact of enrollment decline associated with traditional age-group demographics. Numerous studies have argued the efficacy of marketing and enrollment management strategies as a means of adapting to the changing environment. Implicit in that process is the efficacy of interdependent working relationships within the institution.

The Concept of Roles in Organizations

The importance of role to both the individual and the organization was noted by March and Simon (1958) in their classic work on modern organizations. The defined role provides predictability and stability to the individual and structure and efficiency for the organization. It is also true that definitive roles (or role perceptions) contribute to resistance to change from individuals and units comfortably established in the institutional network.

Kahn, et al, (Schein, 1965, pp. 94-95) noted that the role set of an individual occupying a position or office would be influenced by relationships with subordinates, superiors, peers and others with direct or indirect relationships with the role. They argued that networks of role sets within an organization can be examined to assess role conflict or ambiguity.

The Dean of Admissions, for example, exists within a role set of interdependent relationships with institutional research and

planning staff, alumni staff, financial aid staff, academic administrators, and many others in the institutional community. Yet the interdependent nature of that network is often overlooked in enrollment management.

The security officer who tickets the cars of parents, the financial aid officer who forwards financial aid notification letters, the academic department head who responds to a student problem are all part of the enrollment management network.

The University as a Unique Organization

Unique limitations of colleges and universities have been thoroughly described in the literature. Institutional goals and objectives are necessarily vague, authority is broadly dispersed in units prescribed by disciplinary specializations or functional expertise, and coordination of effort is difficult under the best conditions. It is even more challenging in a period of contraction (Cyert, 1980).

The problem of fragmentation and differentiation in universities is a major deterrent to responsive adaptation to environmental pressures. The fundamental issue is not whether universities should or will change, but how they will adapt to already evident changes in client publics.

> The real enemy of progress now is specialization. It has increased productivity but has gone so far that specialization is dysfunctional. In politics we have one issue fanatics . In education we have territorial fighters. We have more experts in small areas but more fragmentation and anarchic bickering. The trick is to move educated people more toward integrative thinking, to see more connections and consequences, to realize the ties between present decisions and future quality, between their little area of work and the whole organization of which they are a part. (Cleveland in Keller, 1983, p. 41)

Marketing and Enrollment Management

Kotler noted in his premier work:

> If marketing is to be effective, it calls for more than a new function or department. It calls for a new orientation for the organization. Marketing is more than a set of add-on activities. It amounts to a whole new attitude toward the organization's various publics and missions. It is the thoroughgoing adoption of this new orientation that produces major benefits of better survival and growth for the organization and satisfaction for its customers. (Kotler, 1975, pp. 37-38).

Strategic planning models and enrollment management systems have recognized the importance of interdependent effort in the development of institutional strategies. (Barton and Treadwell, 1978, Mims, 1979, Ihlanfeldt, 1980, Kotler and Murphy, 1981, Shirley, 1983).

Several conclusions from recent research related directly to this study are summarized below.

1. Someone must commit time to enrollment management as an institutional priority (Cohen and March, 1974).
2. Strategic leadership must persist in implementation (Cohen and March, 1974).
3. Breadth of participation is essential (Cohen and March, 1974).
4. The collection, interpretation and dissemination of strategic information is essential (Cohen and March, 1974).
5. A strategic level officer to coordinate market research and strategic planning is essential (Fram, 1975).

6. Staff functions which deal with external relationships should be integrated through reporting relationships to a common central officer (Johnson and Gilmore, 1978).
7. Some one person should concentrate and focus on strategy initiation and development (Johnson and Gilmore, 1978).
8. Committee or task force mechanisms are essential for communications among campus groups (Johnson and Gilmore, 1978).

Given the interdependent nature of marketing and enrollment management systems, task awareness and collaborative effort must be developed. A simple overlay in traditionally specialized offices or activities is inadequate.

An expanded matrix of role relationships introduced by Allen (1978) and Fram (1975) to the implementation of marketing and enrollment management is presented in Figure 1.

Few of the offices or roles listed in the marketing and enrollment management matrix can be declared immune from strategic implementation of institutional programs. Yet daily performance of traditional responsibilities often detracts from strategic perspectives and inter-office relationships.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Results reported here are based on an exploratory study of enrollment management and marketing strategies among large state universities. The primary purpose was to develop a descriptive profile of institutional practices related to critical role performance factors in an institutional network.

METHOD

The study population on which results are based included the 61 largest state university users of ACT student profile and research services.

Institutional data for each university were taken from institutional data files maintained by American College Testing, survey of academic and student services officers and on site interviews on 15 of the campuses.

The study population was reduced to 54 universities to eliminate potential bias from changes in institutional policy and the use of ACT data services. Questionnaire responses were received from 44 (81%) of the chief academic officers and 28 (65%) of the student services officers.

Instrumentation and Analysis

The survey instrument was developed in consultation with research staff of American College Testing and field tested with institutional officers in three state universities. The instrument included variables intended to reflect the use of market research, planning, organizational structure, the use of information systems, and selected strategies among state universities in the study.

Institutional responses to each item were grouped into two groups for statistical analysis: 1) those above the median among the participating institutions; and 2) those below the median.

Summary results of data analysis and campus interviews are reported below.

RESULTS

Environmental Information

The use of market research studies of prospective student attitudes and perceptions of the institution was considered as a proxy measure of institutional sensitivity to environmental factors. Chief academic officers in 45% of the responding institutions reported the use of market research studies of prospective student attitudes and perceptions.

Institutional officers acknowledged almost uniformly in campus interviews that decline in college demographics was one of the most pressing management issues expected to confront the campus in the next five year. Even so, more than a majority had yet to develop information systems to monitor enrollment management factors.

Development of Information Systems

A fundamental question related to role ambiguity and the development of information systems dealt with the identification of the campus representative designated to received ACT student profile and research information. The most frequently cited institutional officer receiving that information was the Director of Admissions (31.3%). The second most frequent response from chief academic officers was "don't know" (14.6%) with Directors of Institutional Research ranked third (10.4%).

If decision makers are not aware of information available and who within the institution receives it, utilization of environmental information for strategic decision making is suspect.

Responses revealed that the reported use of information systems for planning and decision-making declined as the need for interpretation and complexity of information increased. Though more than a majority reported the use of demographic profiles of high school seniors and enrolled freshmen, fewer than 25% reported the use of summary reports of undergraduate retention patterns by student and program characteristics. (See Table 1)

A majority of campus officers interviewed acknowledged a lack of familiarity with existing institutional research data and changing student interests from ACT research profiles.

Development of Outreach and Retention Plans

It was presumed that the development and documentation of an institutional plan would be essential not only for the identification of enrollment management goals and objectives, but for communicating task responsibilities and expectations. The presence of documented institutional plans also presumed that institutional activity had occurred to review interdependent relationships.

Documented outreach plans were reported in 57% of the institutions. However, in interviews with campus officers it was learned that outreach plans most frequently focused on admissions timetables and recruitment activities. Few had deliberate strategies to change role expectations and awareness among key personnel involved in the implementation of programs.

Only 27% of the participating institutions reported the development of documented plans for undergraduate student retention. Three of the 44 institutional respondents had

developed integrated outreach and retention plans under the coordination of a central administrative officer.

Absent documented plans to communicate outreach and retention goals and performance objectives, it was concluded that individuals in most universities were left to pursue traditional differentiated approaches.

Perhaps the area of greatest potential development in enrollment management planning is that of defining and articulating explicit enrollment performance goals. Officers interviewed were asked if explicit enrollment management objectives were used in decision-making and planning. Only one participant acknowledged the use of explicit objectives for admissions or retention based on client trends or decision factors. Most used ex-post-facto analysis of freshmen enrolled to identify performance trends.

Support and Participation of Central Administrative Officers

Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs (Provosts) were most frequently cited as directly involved in the final review and approval of student outreach and retention plans (84%). Vice Presidents of Student Services (66%) and Collegiate Deans (64%) were the next most likely to be directly involved.

Results from interviews suggest, however, that participation and involvement of central administrative officers may be more a consequence of the structural framework of the institution than a deliberate strategy to focus enrollment management as a primary institutional concern. Interview subjects acknowledged administrative supervision over staff involved with selected

components of enrollment management. But, in only three instances did officers report personal involvement in deliberate strategies to expand faculty awareness of enrollment issues. None reported the dissemination of special materials or programs to communicate enrollment objectives and expectations.

Interviews revealed potential role conflict and ambiguity among campus officials. A student affairs officer questioned the purpose of interviewing the provost on the subject of enrollment management. He felt the provost should not be involved and should not be made to think he had reason to be. A vice president of academic affairs expressed great concern for enrollment trends but acknowledged little understanding of what "they" were doing about it. In few instances, academic and student affairs officers shared a common perspective of enrollment management goals and strategies. Generally, senior officials valued the functional authority of their administrative colleagues and were hesitant to intrude in another's area. Even so, almost universal agreement was found for the need to address enrollment planning and management as an institutional priority.

Matched responses from chief academic officers and student services officers revealed that a conflict of perspective existed in 61% of the institutions for which both survey responses were available. The two vice presidents reported two <u>different</u> people as singularly responsible for central planning and coordination of outreach planning and programming. The most frequent agreement occurred when both reported no one in charge.

Breadth of Participation in Planning

It has already been noted that vice presidents and deans were involved in more than a majority of institutions. The participation of faculty representatives (30%), student representatives (18%) and alumni representatives (7%) was far less prevalent. One might conclude that role expectations of such constituencies are constrained by isolation from the enrollment planning process. Others reported in open ended responses included the president, admissions director, orientation director, and heads of student services offices.

Structured interviews included items directly related to the degree of coordination and cooperation among campus offices or constituents. All but one of the campus site visit interviewees reported limited or average faculty awareness of enrollment management issues or strategies. One reported considerable interest and involvement of the faculty. Five academic officers interviewed reported that campus offices operated with limited perspectives related to their own specific office activities, nine acknowledged that coordination and cooperation existed primarily on a voluntary or informal basis, and one reported formal authority for review and coordination of enrollment management to a central administrative officer. In brief, participation in planning and coordination of enrollment management was perceived as a highly de-centralized and informal activity. One interview subject frankly acknowledged, "we only plan together when we drink together."

Continuity of Leadership and Responsibility

It was presumed that the efficacy of enrollment management and interdependency of group roles would be influenced by the continuity of leadership provided by the designation of some one person to sustain interest and coordinate efforts. A single person was reported responsible for student outreach plans and programs in 37 (84%) of the institutions while only 15 (34%) reported a single person designated as responsible for planning and coordinating retention programs. Given the interdependency between recruitment and retention strategies and results, potential role ambiguity exists in those situations where outreach and retention is developed in isolation from retention as an institutional priority.

More than 38% of the individuals identified as responsible for outreach planning and coordination were directors of admissions. Only 14% of the institutional responses identified a person at the strategic level - slightly less than the proportion which reported nobody in charge.

Three of the 44 respondents reported the designation of a single individual at the central administrative level to plan and coordinate both outreach and retention strategies. Interviews revealed that in one of the three campuses where reorganization had occurred, staff were resentful of the intrusion in their traditional areas of operation, although enrollment performance results on that campus ranked among the highest of the 61 universities.

Significance of Selected Organizational Factors

It was acknowledged before the study that the multi-variant nature of the admissions and enrollment process presented a major limitation to any single effort to analyze the total system. Even so, it was assumed that an exploratory study of relationships between institutional practice and enrollment performance would be of interest to researchers as well as institutional decision makers.

Responses for all items on the survey questionnaire were analyzed using the chi square statistic. While causal inferences cannot be made, the following statistical relationships were nevertheless of interest.

1. Institutions with a single person responsible for outreach planning and coordination were more likely to have developed a documented outreach plan. [X^2 (1,N=44)=4.2493, p. <.04]
2. Institutions with a documented outreach plan were more likely to have experienced an above median increase in the enrollment of freshmen from 1st choice ACT test pool populations. [X^2 (1,N=44)=4.3729, p. <.04]
3. Institutions with assigned responsibility for planning and coordination of both outreach and retention were more likely to have reported use of market research studies of student interests and perceptions. [X^2 (1,N=44)=4.2864, p. <.04]
4. Institutions with reported use of market research studies of prospective student attitudes and interests were more

likely to have developed documented plans for retention. [X^2 (1,N=44)=3.1822, p. < .055]

5. Institutions reporting the development of both an outreach and retention plan under the coordination of an officer in a vice presidential level office were more likely to involve alumni in outreach planning efforts. [X^2 (1,N=44)=9.4491, p. <.002]
6. Institutions with others (than Vice Presidents; Deans; Faculty, Student and Alumni representatives) involved in review and approval of outreach plans were more likely to have experienced undergraduate enrollment growth above the median. [X^2 (1,N=44)=4.3753, p. < .04]
7. Institutions with a strategic level person assigned responsibility for planning and coordination of retention programs were more likely to have experienced an above the median increase in the market share of 1st choice ACT test reports in their home states. [Fisher's Exact Text, p. <.01]

DISCUSSION

The literature of planning and enrollment management in higher education has given considerable attention to the importance of organizational structure and working relationships for effective enrollment planning and management. Positioning the institution to reflect an entirely new perspective based on external trends, interests, and demands necessitates careful review and development of roles throughout the institution.

Results reported here demonstrate positive relationships between critical role performance factors and enrollmert

management measures among major state universities. They also reflect considerable potential for universities concerned with more effective management and development.

Market research of prospective student attitudes, interests and perceptions remains to be developed in a majority of state universities included in the study. Even greater attention needs to be given to the selection and dissemination of information among campus decision-makers.

Available research and information becomes meaningful only when interpreted, disseminated and used by key decision makers within the institution. Results of this study indicate that existing student market research and profile information is not widely understood or used by institutional officers.

Considerable potential remains among state universities for development of enrollment planning and management systems. Many have yet to develop any plan. Among those who report institutional plans for outreach and retention, the emphasis is on recruitment activities with limited attention to broader strategic issues and concerns. Far more attention needs to be given to the definition and integration of role expectations across and among functional specialities within the university community. Plans, once developed, deserve much broader distribution and exposure. They should not be insulated from faculty, staff and others involved in the implementation of critical enrollment management strategies. Above all, enrollment management plans require far more attention to measurable enrollment outcomes which can be used to realistically monitor institutional performance.

The involvement and participation of central administrative leadership is essential not only to lend credibility to enrollment management as a central institutional priority but, more importantly, to define and develop coordinating linkages among faculty, staff and others. Results reported here suggest confusion related to enrollment management responsibility. Enrollment management needs to be recognized as an institutional priority limited to neither academic affairs nor student services but which requires an integrated effort of all institutional contacts. Central officers must be actively involved in the process as agents of direction and change as well as administrators of functional units or specialities. Passive approval or symbolic participation merely reinforces the status quo and fragmentation of effort.

Evidence would suggest that the breadth of participation in the enrollment planning and management process is positively related to role clarification and objective results. Considerable attention needs to be given to the development of enrollment management and planning as a collaborative process.

Perhaps the most important step in the development of effective enrollment management is the identification of some one person to provide continuity of leadership. Leadership requires time, perseverance and creative use of information. If enrollment management is considered an essential institutional priority, it cannot be developed as a secondary interest or task assignment. Neither can it exist in an organizational role insulated from a total institutional perspective and the

essential status or authority to assure integration of institutional efforts.

Results indicate a positive relationship between the assignment of a single person at the strategic level (office of a vice president) with primary responsibility for enrollment management to enrollment performance measures. If everyone is in charge, too frequently no one is. If some one person is accountable for supporting the administration, faculty, and staff in the development and implementation of enrollment management strategies and programs, plans are more likely to be developed and results are more likely to be achieved.

Few institutions have directly addressed the issue of organizational change and working relationships related to changing student markets and social pressures. Those who have realized positive enrollment goals between 1979 and 1982.

As noted by Duplass, a new direction takes courage and initiative and is not without risks.

> A marketing plan calls for bold and decisive action, yet not every administration or faculty is able to overcome the pressures exerted by special interest groups. In the final analysis, marketing can be implemented only in organizations that are willing to make difficult and, at times, unpopular decisions and that can assert the management control needed to implement decisions. This organizational commitment is a prerequisite to marketing, not a by-product; and it can be made only by a leadership that sees the marketing process as a direction-setting force. (Duplass, 1983, p. 19)

Figure 1: MARKETING AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT MATRIX

	Evaluation of External Environment	Institutional Strengths/ Development Opportunities	Goal Formulation Program Strategies	Organizational Development/ Coordination	Information Systems and Evaluation	Program Development and Implementation
President	x	x	x	x	x	x
VP Academic Affairs	x	x	x	x	x	x
VP Student Service	x	x	x	x	x	x
VP Finance	x	x	x		x	x
Collegiate Deans	x	x	x	x	x	x
Department Heads	x	x	x	x	x	x
Faculty	x	x	x	x	x	x
Admissions Officer	x	x	x	x	x	x
Financial Aid	x	x	x	x	x	x
Public Affairs	x	x	x	x	x	x
Publications		x		x		x
Alumni Affairs	x	x	x	x	x	x
Institutional Research	x	x	x	x	x	x
Development	x	x	x	x	x	x
Career Placement	x	x	x	x	x	x
Registrar	x	x	x	x	x	x
Bursar		x	x	x	x	x
Advising	x	x	x	x	x	x
Orientation	x	x	x	x	x	x
Residence Halls		x	x	x	x	x
Athletics			x	x		x
Recreation Services	x	x	x	x	x	x
Cultural Affairs	x	x	x	x	x	x
Computer Services	x	x	x	x	x	x
Legislative Affairs	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sponsored Research	x	x	x	x	x	x
Counseling Services	x	x	x	x	x	x
Student Health Services	x	x	x	x	x	x
Campus Security	x	x	x	x	x	x
Student Activities	x	x	x	x	x	x
Alumni	x	x	x			x
Parents	x	x	x		x	x
Current Students	x	x	x	x	x	x

TABLE 1: Incidence of Market Research and Information Uses (N=44)

	Yes		No		N.R.	
Use of Market Research	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Market research study of prospective student markets?	20	45%	24	55%	-	-
Use of Information for Planning *						
Demographic profiles of seniors in state high schools?	31	70%	12	27%	1	2%
Profiles of enrolled freshmen compared to state freshmen?	30	68%	12	27%	2	5%
Analysis of freshman enrollment yields by student segments?	24	55%	17	39%	3	7%
Retention patterns by student and program characteristics?	10	23%	33	75%	1	2%
Course and staffing forecasts based on applicant test pool?	12	27%	23	52%	9	20%
Systematic procedures used to monitor freshman persistence?	11	25%	33	75%	-	-
Use of all of the above data formats for planning and decision making:	3	7%	41	93%	-	-

* For responses to the use of information for planning and decision making, a yes response indicates current use and no indicates that it is considered useful but not currently used.

TABLE 2: Incidence of documented plans for student outreach and retention (N=44)

	Yes		No		N.R.	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
A documented plan for student outreach is completed:	25	57%	18	41%	1	2%
Developed outreach plans have been distributed to departments:	17	39%	8	18%	19	43%
A documented plan for retention has been completed:	12	27%	31	70%	1	2%
Developed retention plans have been distributed to departments:	9	20%	2	5%	33	75%
The institution has both outreach and retention plans documented and coordinated by a person on vice president's staff:	3	7%	41	93%	-	-

Table 4: Primary responsibility assigned for planning and coordinating outreach and retention (N=44)

	Yes		No		N.R.	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
One person assigned responsibility for outreach:	27	84%	6	14%	1	2%
One person assigned responsibility for retention:	15	34%	23	52%	6	14%
One person assigned responsibility for outreach and retention:	12	27%	32	73%	-	-
Responsibility for outreach assigned to strategic level:	5	11%	39	89%	-	-
Responsibility for retention assigned to strategic level:	4	9%	40	91%	-	-

TABLE 3: Representatives involved in final review and endorsement of outreach and retention plans (N=44)

	Yes		No		N.R.	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Vice president for academic affairs (Provost):	37	84%	7	16%	-	-
Vice president for student services:	29	66%	15	34%	-	-
Collegiate Deans:	28	64%	16	36%	-	-
Faculty Representatives:	13	30%	31	70%	-	-
Student Representatives:	8	18%	36	93%	-	-
Alumni Representatives :	3	7%	41	93%	-	-
Others (Including president, admissions, student services heads, institutional research, counseling director, housing director, etc.)	9	20%	35	80%	-	-
Institutions with five or more of the above involved in final review of plans:	8	18%	36	82%	-	-

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